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The United Andean-Indian Mission Becomes A Reality

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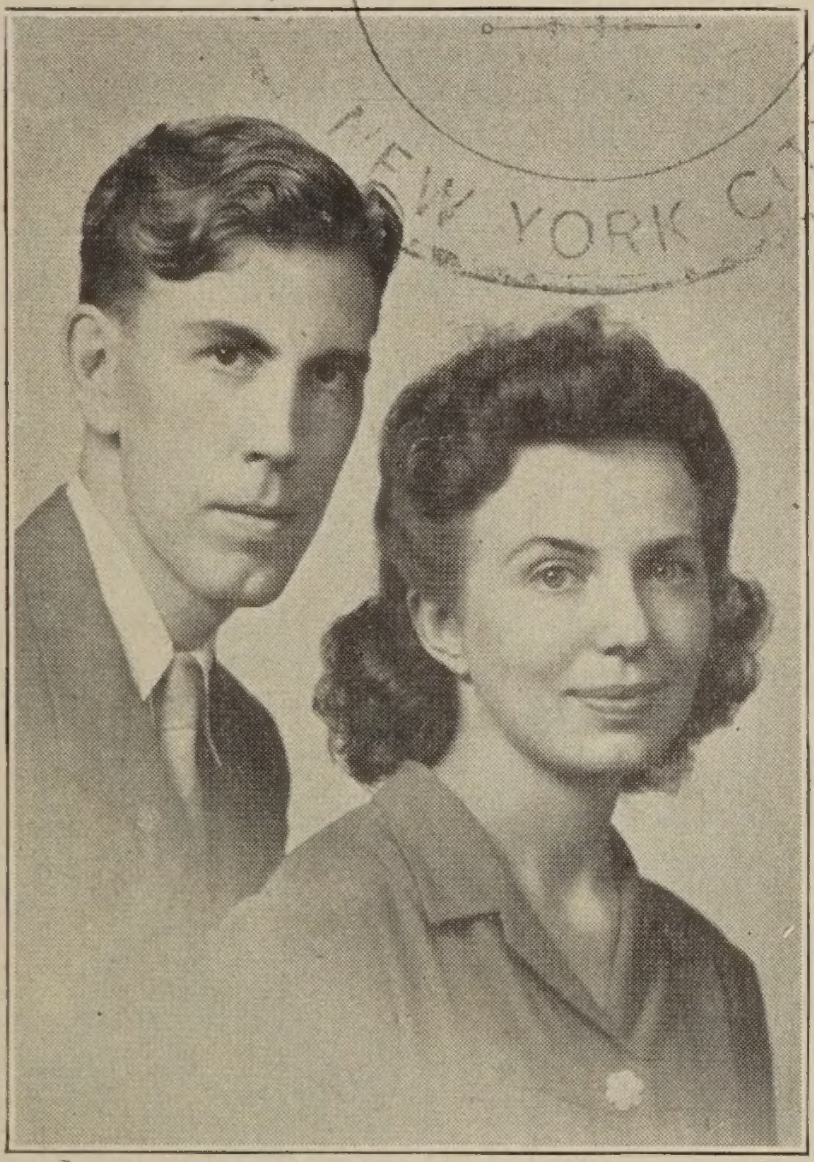

Rev. and Mrs. Paul H. Streich

The First Missionaries of the United Andean-Indian Mission in South America

[1946?]

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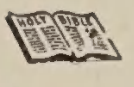
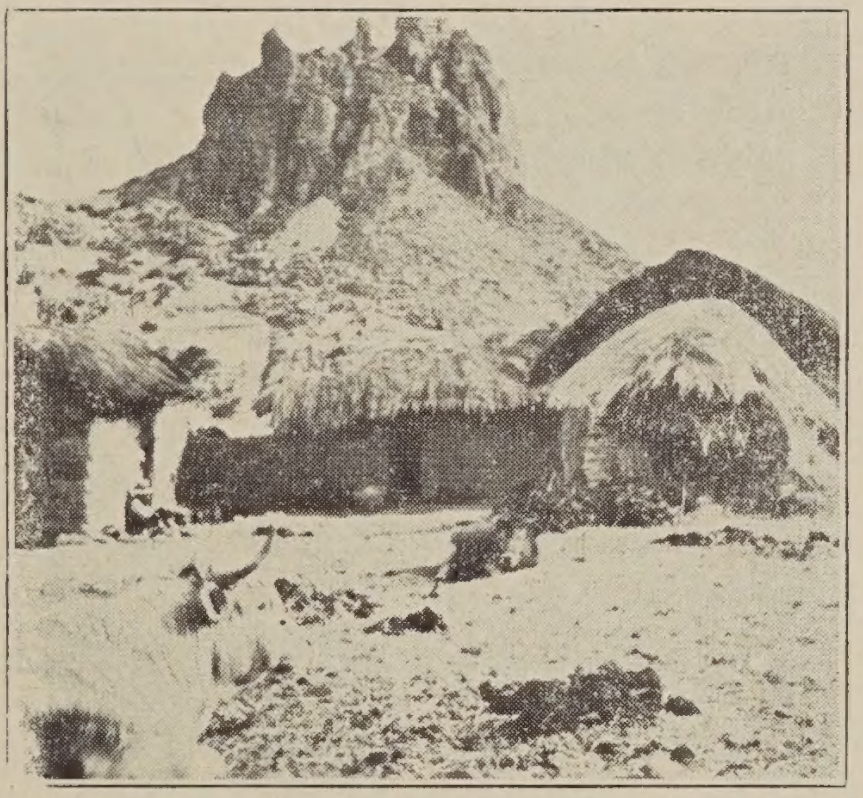


First Missionaries Called

Too long have the seven million Indians living in the lofty Andes of South America been the concern chiefly of anthropologists and sociologists. For many years their deplorable condition, both of body and soul,



Photograph by Earl C. Merrick

The Indians of the Andean Highlands live in hovels of indescribable wretchedness.

has cried out for deliverance. For us, the answer to this cry is found in the recently organized United Andean Indian Mission, of which our Board of International Missions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church has the honor of being a charter member.

At its meeting on June 19, 1945, the Executive Committee of the Mission appointed Dr. Earl B. Merrick, who has had remarkable success in the Guatajata Mission of Bolivia, to direct the new project during the period of its initiation. Dr. Merrick has been loaned for two years by the Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Rev. and Mrs. Paul H. Streich, of Christ Evangelical and Reformed Church, New York City, were appointed as the first full term missionaries, and are expected to accompany Dr. Merrick to Ecuador about October first. Mr. Streich is a graduate of Washington University, St. Louis, and Eden Theological Seminary, Webster Groves, Mo., while Mrs. Streich is an alumna of Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pa.

How the Idea Started

Several years ago the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church (North) appealed to other interested Boards in behalf of these isolated and neglected descendants of the sun-worshipping Incas. The Board of International Missions joined in sending a Commission of five outstanding men, appointed by the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, to make a survey.

Upon the Commission's return it recommended the opening of an agriculturally based mission project. Its report plainly stated, "We are fully aware of the difficulties involved in carrying out the recommendations, and realize that they will demand courage, faith, sympathetic understanding and statesmanship on the part of mission boards who feel called of God to undertake the task." Four boards accepted this challenge, and in the fall of 1944 organized the United Andean Indian Mission with Dr. W. S. Rycroft as secretary-treasurer. Dr. F. A. Goetsch represents our Church in the governing body.

The People to Whom We Are Going

The Andean Indians consist of two main tribes—the Kechua and the Aymara—and are known as a "hardy, unchangeable and unbreakable people." They make up from fifty to eighty per cent of the population of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Dr. J. Merle Davis, one of the Commission members, says of them: "Conquered, dominated and enslaved by successive conquests, these aboriginal Americans have to an extraordinary extent preserved their identity, their language, their racial type, way of life, superstitions and outlook. They live quite apart from the life-stream of Spanish civilization about them and under a subsistence economy and social organization virtually unchanged from the earliest recorded history."

Their evangelization represents a missionary task of the first magnitude. It calls for work in a field which seems as detached from the modern world and as impenetrable as was the India of Carey, the Burma of Judson and the China of Robert Morrison. Another Commission member, Dr. Walter J. Clothier, says: "The task will be difficult, the life a dangerous one, but the reward for the worker will be unsurpassed anywhere."

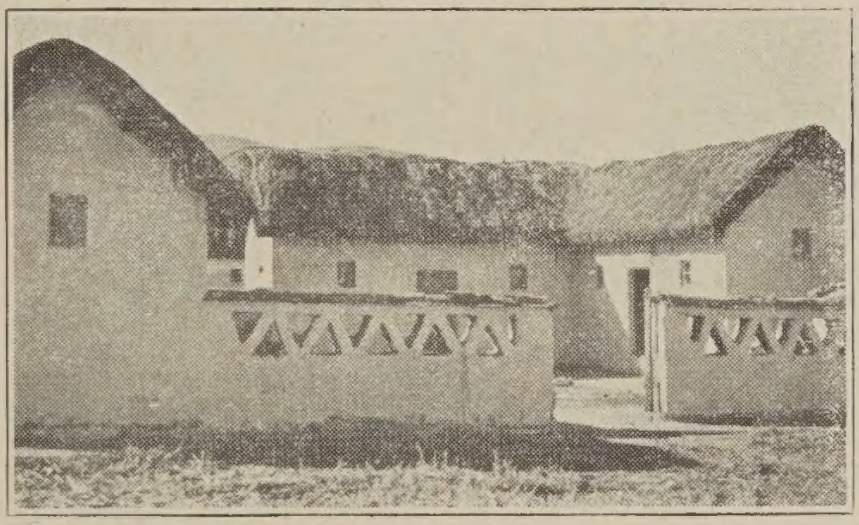
Photograph by Earl C. Merrick

An Indian of the Andean Highland

The Kind of Mission We Plan to Start

Let Dr. Merrick tell the inspiring story of the Guatajata Mission, after which we wish to pattern the new mission:

"It is over eighty years ago that Antonio Chiriotto, a simple-hearted Italian peasant knelt in a Pentecostal Mission in Los Angeles, called Peniel Hall, and prayed for faith to the saving of his soul. He found it. Immediately he asked for faith that would be the means of saving other souls, particularly peasant souls. He found that too. He returned to the Argentine, where he had landed first as an immigrant from Europe. He carried all his earthly possessions in the form of thirty thousand dollars which he had made by shoeing horses and cultivating grapes. His purpose was to found an independent missionary society in the Argentine.



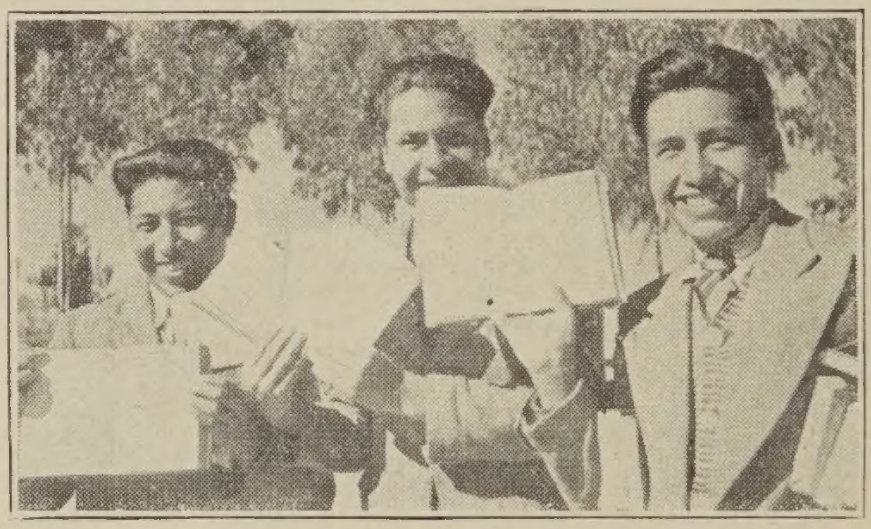
Photograph by Earl C. Merrick

The Indians are being taught to build good houses.

Through a friend he learned of the great Indian tribes of the Andean highlands and determined that there his money and his faith should be put to work.

"He named three men in his will to constitute an independent missionary board to be known as Peniel Hall Society. They were to use one half of the capital to purchase a farm amongst the Indians and on the farm to establish evangelical and educational work. The other half of the foundation fund was to be invested in good securities. The three men named soon found themselves the owners of a typical South American hacienda of one thousand acres and two hundred serfs. . . .

"After nine years of administration by the Methodists, the Canadian Baptists agreed to adopt the baby. We gave them a church, but it seemed to mean little to them. At the foot of its beautiful white tower there was



Photograph by Earl C. Merrick

Young men who have been brought under the influence of the gospel.

one of the most wretched of all the wretched hovels. We gave them a good school, but for long years it remained scarcely half full.

"In 1934 we looked again at our two hundred peons and determined to accept a Christian responsibility for those one thousand acres of tired, worn-out soil, those wretched hovels, those serf minds and those diseased bodies.

"We called together our Indians and said to them: 'We are going to give you land of your own and you will no longer be peons.' They grunted and blinked in sullen misunderstanding. We said: 'For the next five years, you must do certain things. Many of you must move your houses. All of you must be willing to change your present holdings, repair your houses, continue your farm obligations faithfully, send your children to school, plant trees, defend yourselves before the law. You must learn to be men. If you do this, at the end of five years we will give you land and freedom.' A shadow of pain, confusion and rebellion swept over those brown faces.

"At the end of three years, there were signs that old smothered fires of racial virtue had felt a breath of air. The church and the school began to fill up. As peon obligations were dropped one by one, those duties which remained were fulfilled in good will.

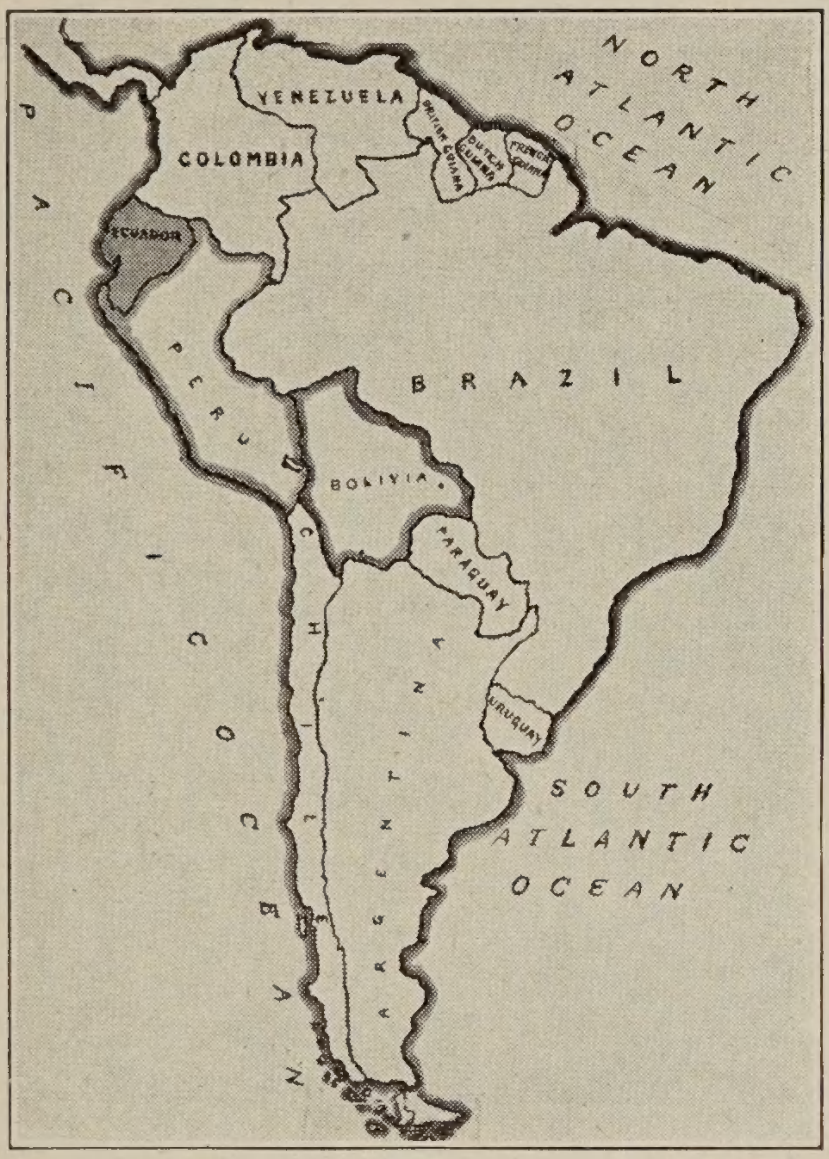
"At the end of five years, all phases of the land re-adjustment plan were almost up-to-date. Thirty-seven families out of forty were qualified to receive title deeds and freedom. At the end of the sixth year we

formally handed over to all our former serfs legal titles to their own land and a new free community, legally named, La Communidad de Guatajata, came into existence.

"Today, Guatajata Farm is the active center of seventy-five square miles of lake shore country, and every square mile of that area is under the intensive influence of our program. In the normal activities of one week we make 1700 contacts, — schools 500, services 900, clinic 200, farm 100. We have two organized churches, one with a membership of 121; the other with a membership of 18 and a chain of eight school-churches extending through the entire area. Each school-church is managed by an Indian teacher.

"Our whole purpose can now be written in a single sentence. We are there to demonstrate that the one and only foundation for life is personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and His Cross and when such spiritual and moral conviction accompanies all other reforms, the whole of life partakes of the nature of the Kingdom of God."

We trust that in a few years the United Andean Indian Mission, now being launched, may have a similar story to tell of successful endeavor in redeeming men for Christ. Let us follow our own first missionaries to the Andean Indians not only with our well-wishes and gifts, but also with our constant prayers and sympathetic interest.



South America

Prospective fields of the United Andean Indian Mission—Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia.

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